

N. Lincoln

THE HOPEFULNESS OF INDIAN MISSIONS,

As seen in the light of History.

By Rev. A. F. BEARD, D.D.



The contemplation of the past sometimes weakens the energies for action in the present. But when the present is a consequence of the past, we can scarcely do our work rightly if we neglect the lessons of experience.

The history of missions among our Indian tribes has lessons in it which may be wisely heeded.

When the first settlers of this country left their ships, which had been freighted with the destinies of a continent, and faced the perils of a wilderness, they met at the outset a strange people. No one knew who they were, nor how many; they themselves did not know. They had no history. They had become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Ignorant as to the past, their theory of the future was vague and shadowy. Their spirits would exist after death. The heroic and brave and worthy would go to the happy hunting-grounds, where would be pleasant climate and fair weather, and where abundance would be exhaustless and satisfactions complete. The unworthy would wander without in a state of misfortune and restless discontent. For their religious ceremonies, a priesthood existed, and those who composed this were devoted to it from their childhood. The howling dervishes of Turkey and the pagan priests of the South Sea Islands, may be compared with the pow-wows of the North American Indians.

It is impossible to estimate the number of this aboriginal population. Doubtless the popular impression is an exaggerated one. It would be safe to say that, all told, there were never at any one period, more than half a million of these people, occupying the present territory of the United States from ocean to ocean. They were widely scattered, so that there were great stretches of forest and prairie lying between the different tribes.

There were many groups, distinct in their languages, which yet bore a general resemblance to each other in construction, so that the several tribes could at least easily learn to understand each other. I think that the weight of authority is, that they belong to one family of nations, and are derived from one stock, while they display considerable diversities in language and customs.

The motive of the early settlers of New England, which took precedence over all others—as they declared—was “*a desire to advance the gospel in these remote parts of the world, even if they should be but stepping-stones to those who were to follow them.*” Finding these barbarous tribes here, the Pilgrim Fathers bartered with them for peaceable possession, which they did not always secure. As civilization encroached upon barbarism, the colonists kept their homes often only by the defences of war. But peace was in the hearts and purposes of the early settlers.

As early as 1643, the Rev. John Eliot, who had been educated at the University of Cambridge, England, and who had come to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1630, wrote that he had “been through varieties of intercourse with the Indians, and had many solemn discourses with all sorts of nations of them.” It was his theory that they were the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. He acquired their language. It was an arduous undertaking, but he said “Prayer and pains through faith in Christ Jesus will do anything.”

In 1660, he had visited all the Indians in the Massachusetts and Plymouth Colonies, and preached the gospel to them, and the first Indian church was then formed.

In 1661, he had translated the New Testament into the Indian tongue, and in 1663, the Old Testament. This Indian Bible was published at Cambridge, and was the only Bible printed in America until a much later period. Besides this, Eliot instituted schools, and induced large numbers to give up their savage customs and habits, and to form themselves into civilized communities.

The zeal of Eliot quickened that of others, and in 1674, there was a missionary circuit of 14 villages and 1,100 praying Indians.

At this same date, through the sacrificial labors of Mr. Thomas Mayhew and his son, there were 1,500 praying Indians in the Island of Martha's Vineyard and vicinity. The next year came war—King Philip's War. It meant extermination of the whites, or conquest of the red men. Civilization was too strong to be resisted by barbarism, and then began the long catalogue of organized Indian miseries. The General Court ordered the removal of the conquered Indians, and they were pushed away before the aggressive steps of a stronger race. In 1743, the Rev. David Brainerd was propagating missions among the Indians with success in various places. Idolatrous sacrifices were altogether abolished; many heathen customs lost their sanction, and sincere converts were made whose pious lives and peaceful deaths attested to the influence of the spirit of God in their hearts.

At this period of history the Moravian Church began missions in Pennsylvania among the Delawares. Christian Rauch soon won the confidence of the savages and excited their astonishment. And observing him asleep in his hut, an Indian said: “This man cannot be a bad man, he fears no evil, he does not fear us who are so fierce, but he sleeps in peace and puts his life in our hands.” There was a remarkable acknowledgment of this

mission in converted souls. The Moravian Missions in various sections of the country, from the early date of 1740 until now, have been characterized by courage, activity, humility and devotion. In the midst of these scenes of devastation and murder, the Moravian missionaries have wandered in deserts, in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth, never relinquishing their purposes, and they have obtained a good report through faith.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which began its existence in 1812, adopted measures in 1815 for carrying the gospel to the Indians. One hundred thousand of these people, as untamed as when the Pilgrims met them at Plymouth, as ignorant in most respects, and as truly heathen as were their fathers centuries before them, were then supposed to be living east of the Mississippi River. The first mission was among the Creeks and Cherokees. Three missionaries and their wives began the work. In character it was a compound of mission boarding school and agricultural college. In eighteen months, the Indian boys could read the Bible, and nearly a score of them could write; five converted heathen were members of the church.

Next, in 1818, missions were begun among the Chickasaws and the Choctaws. Here, also, the first work was that of the school. So eager were the Choctaws for instruction, that eight children were brought 160 miles across the country before the missionaries were ready for them, and in one year from that date the Choctaw Nation voted to devote to the schools their entire annuity of *six thousand dollars*, from the sale of their lands to the United States.

The missionaries were subject to unceasing hindrances from renegade whites, who are always on the borders of civilization, and have usually been the enemies of missionaries.

But among the Cherokees no year passed without conversions. Those who appeared to the missionaries so wild and forbidding that they were received with fear, came under the gospel power and were clothed and in their right mind. In six years the Church had largely increased. Indians traveled a score of miles to attend the services. As yet, there was no Cherokee written language. This mission was eight years old when the four gospels were translated into the Cherokee tongue, and in three or four years more, one-half the nation could read. There were now among the Cherokees and the Choctaws, eighteen missionary stations.

In 1826, the Board began work among eight other tribes in different parts of the country.

It next took charge of the Stockbridge tribe, whose ancestors had enjoyed the ministry of the celebrated Dr. Jonathan Edwards. They were originally in Massachusetts. They were pushed back hundreds of miles to Central New York, then pushed further back hundreds of miles to Indiana; then pushed still further back hundreds of miles to Michigan, and finally pushed back once more and allowed to rest in the remote West—in Minnesota.

During all these cruel removals, they had themselves kept alive a school, and had among them exemplary Christians. Now, after one hundred years of such history, the American Board put a mission among them. The church survived, and the whole settlement took in the spirit of civilization and took on its forms. A year later were added the missions to the Chickasaws, and now, about the close of the year 1830, it seemed as if the fruitage of this Indian missionary consecration were at hand. Half the Cherokees in Georgia could read. Civilized life had taken firm hold on them, and they were governing themselves with Christian laws. Eight churches were in life and power among them. The Chickasaws had their church in Arkansas, and the Cherokees there, another. The churches of the Choctaws had received to their communions that year two hundred and fifty members who were hopefully converted, and in all the Indian Missions of the American Board there was a steady increase of hopefulness, while the members in tribes were also increasing.

"Everywhere the fruits of the missions among the Indians were abundant. No more docile pagans were ever approached with the gospel than some of these peoples."

Nevertheless, from this period of time, Indian missions cease to be successful for a generation.

The mission to the Chickasaws was abandoned in 1834; to the Osages in 1836; to the Stockbridge tribe, in 1848; to the Choctaws, in 1859; to the Tuscaroras, in 1860; and to the Cherokees, in 1860; until at last but a single mission remained, that among the great Sioux tribes or the Dakotas. Twelve missions and forty-five churches, which reached about one hundred thousand Indians abandoned in twenty-six years!

The question now asks itself: "Why were not these hopeful missionary efforts to these pagan tribes more permanent? What turned the tide of success and left the missions stranded?" Here comes the story of dishonor. The Indian was here when the white man came. The Christian white men recognized the Indian's right of occupancy as a right. They did *not* hold that half a million savages had a right to dispute the ultimate sovereignty of civilization, but they agreed that when civilization should move forward and barbarism should retreat, the Indian should have Christian justice and not un-Christian wrong. He should not be oppressed. He should be treated equitably. His rights should be acknowledged, and if the demands of the greater number and the greater life asked for a surrender of his rights as original occupant, then there should be fair consideration, compensation and honesty. It may be the providence of God that barbarism shall be crowded out by civilization, that the Indian's hunting-ground shall yield to the railway and the marts of commerce. It may not be right that a continent of eight millions of square miles, more than twice the size of all Europe, fair and beautiful and rich in resources, should be kept for game preserves for half a million savages. It is right that the forest should fall to make room for New

England villages, with their churches and school-houses and industry. The rude stage of existence must make way for a higher. But the higher has no right to be wicked in its onward movement. It has no right to rob or cheat. It has no right to make compacts and violate them. It has no right to break its faith with the weak. It has no right to outrage the principle of justice.

The history of Indian wrongs by the whites in the inevitable advances of civilization, need not be recited here. Unscrupulous greed has hovered about the Indian reservations as waiting buzzards hover near the wounded creature upon whose flesh they would fatten. Lands guaranteed to the Indians were encroached upon by white people. These encroachments resisted led to wars. Savage nature, wrought up with a sense of injustice and burning for revenge, swept down upon guilty intruders and innocent settlers alike, with indiscriminate massacre. Then the Government called out its soldiery, and Indian wars with less than half a million savages have cost the United States \$500,000 000, enough to plant missions among all the heathen tribes of the world.

Frontiersmen who have coveted the Indian reservations, when they already had more land than they could use, without the possessions which they desired to secure, have satisfied themselves that a degraded race of savages had no rights which they were bound to respect; and how could the missionaries prosper, when the ignorant saw such exhibitions of character and life on the part of the people from whom the missionaries came? These wars have led to cancellation of treaties, because of inhuman violence, and then, the reservation taken up, the savage is removed still further back. Thus the Indians have been planted and upturn, re-planted and upturn, and re-planted, until they are now removed, not hundreds of miles from the grounds of their fathers, but thousands of miles. A tree will not grow if uprooted and transplanted every few months, and this will in brief tell us why the missions which began with the Moravians and the American Board, and which were so hopeful, were one after another abandoned. These constant removals were as disastrous to missions as they were unjust to the Indians. It was remarkable that there should be the degree of spiritual fruitage through all this period of Indian removals and Indian wrongs, which characterizes the labors of those who often, at peril of life, labored on for the red man's salvation.

The American Board began its work among the Dakotas in 1835. It was one of the most powerful tribes on the continent, numbering over 40,000. Their hunting-grounds extended from the 43° to the 49° of latitude, and from the Mississippi River to the Black Hills west of the Missouri. This was a territory equal in extent to that of Scotland. The name Dakota means the "allied one," and indicates the bands that united to form the tribe. The missionary work, which was initiated under Rev. T. S. Williamson, Rev. J. D. Stevens and Rev. S. Riggs, with their wives, and lady teachers, began prosperously, and in six years forty-nine persons were formed into a church. For some years the accessions were mostly women. The acceptance of Chris-

tianity was more difficult to the men. The change in the manner of life involved in it was greater. It meant entire reconstruction of their ideas of life, and in the manner of it, the abandonment of polygamy, the adoption of civilized dress, the spirit of obedience and industry. These were the contradictions to centuries of tradition and custom, and meant to an Indian brave the becoming like a woman. At length, however, the gospel did take hold of the warriors. The work and the faith of the missionaries were thoroughly tested by the opposition this aroused, but the gospel won its way. At last, when the rumors of the Civil War between the Northern and the Southern States came to the Indians, it set their hearts aflame for battle with their white neighbors, whose encroachment they resented.

Then broke out the dreadful Minnesota massacre, when the missionaries were compelled to flee for their lives, and the missions were abandoned. Twelve hundred United States troops at last scattered the savages and took about five hundred prisoners. They were incarcerated at the Mankato prison in Minnesota, where thirty-eight were hung in one day. The remainder in prison were visited by the missionaries, and the prison house became a chapel. Soon it was a Bethel, a great revival began, which lasted all winter, and in the spring, two hundred Dakotas were added to the church in one day, and when they were transferred to the prison at Davenport, they went out in chains, but singing the 51st Psalm to the tune of Old Hundred. They carried the fire from heaven with them to the Davenport prison, and when, in 1886, the prisoners were released, more than four hundred were hopefully converted, and when they joined their families in Nebraska, these gathered together in one communion, and called it the Pilgrim Church—about two hundred years after John Eliot, of the Pilgrims at Boston, gave his life to the Indians of Massachusetts. A people as remote from civilization as were the Indians of 1640 founded their Pilgrim Church.

Now at length the Dakota missionaries began a new life among these tribes. By the wonderful and strange providence of God, there had been prepared in prison native teachers and preachers, and the way was opened for expansive work.

After a period of ten years of this work, the American Board transferred its Indian missions to the American Missionary Association. This Association, thirty years previous to this, had Indian missions in the northwest, with twenty-one missionaries. Various causes had led to *their* abandonment, the chief one being the demands of the newly-emancipated slaves after the war.

Six years before the transfer of these missions to this Association, it had an interest in Indian missions in Washington Territory and in Minnesota. The transfer on the part of the American Board brought under our care the mission at Santee, Nebraska, with its large school and industrial departments; the Fort Sully mission, those on the Cheyenne River, and at Fort Berthold, Dakota. These have since been developed, until now, the facilities for missionary work and the force of workers have been greatly increased.

There are at the present time in the United States, exclusive of Alaska, 247,761 Indians. Our missions are chiefly among 40,000 of the Sioux or Dakota tribe, in the great Dakota reservation; among the Poncas in Nebraska, and the Gros Ventres and Mandans on the Northern Missouri.

At the Santee Normal School, we are teaching about two hundred Indian youth of both sexes. We are instructing them also in agriculture and trades. There is a department for theological study, where missionaries are prepared from the Indians for the Indians. Sixty-one missionaries and teachers have caught the spirit of Eliot, Edwards and Brainerd, and are earnestly serving Christ among these tribes.

A Christian civilization is wedging its way in until eighty thousand Indians are now clothed in civilized dress. Forty thousand have learned to read English, and nearly thirty thousand are living in houses. There are forty thousand Indian children of school age, and about fourteen thousand enrolled as pupils, leaving between twenty and thirty thousand children for whom as yet there are no schools provided. Sixty-eight tribes remain without a church, a school or a missionary, absolutely destitute of Christian light.

It has been said that these heathen tribes are a vanishing people, destined to decline and finally to disappear. Certainly their condition for two hundred years has tended to decrease them, and yet, when Columbus discovered America there were not double the number that there are now. In happier conditions than formerly, there is a decided increase in the Indian population, as there is betterment in their customs and modes of life. Their missionary teachers find them with the ancient characteristics unchanged—rude in thought, though with a marked intellectual power. The open book of nature, the Indian knows well. He will tell you the habits of bird and beast and tree and plant. He will tell you the time of day by looking at a leaf. But the life of civilization comes hard to him. He does not know the value of time, nor the value of money. It is hard for him to measure his days or to provide for the future, or to care for to-morrow. He has not the heredity of civilization and Christianity, hence missionary work sometimes seems slow in progress, but it is surely gaining upon this almost dead past of half a century. Thirteen Missionary Boards are now pressing forward to teach them the way and the truth and the life.

The doors are wide open as never before. The hearts of the Indians are friendly as never for two hundred years. If the majority of them show as yet no deep desire for that which Christianity brings, they are not, in this, dissimilar from other heathen. But this desire is growing. The Government at last is seeking to redeem the past. It has appropriated for the Indian tribes reservations larger, in square miles, than the whole German Empire. The Republic of France must re-annex considerable of its ancient possessions before it will own as much land as is now the property of the Indians in the United States. Under these conditions, the hopefulness of the past argues for a more hopeful future of missionary work.

Our mission is to raise up teachers, preachers, interpreters and a native agency that shall work for the regeneration of their own people. It is a mission that is hopeful.

It means a good déal to teach those who come to us in moccasins and blankets, arithmetic, algebra, the elements of geometry, physical geography, natural philosophy and mental science. It means much to give them an industrial training that shall show them how to live rightly, and enable them to do it. But above all, in all and through all, is the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to their salvation. Perhaps no missions to the heathen have been more blessed than many of these to the wild, painted savages. Thousands who were barbarian in heart and in deed are now true disciples of Christ. Where heathenism held its revels, now the church-bell calls the red man to prayer, and the war-whoop is being exchanged for songs of Christian praise. Wigwams are being transformed into houses, and coarse and cruel people are illustrating home piety and virtues. The prayers of God's people have been well directed, and there is every reason why they should be increased, the wilderness and the solitary place being made glad for them. The missionaries among them behold the time when God will make for them a way, even a highway, that shall be the way of holiness, in which the redeemed shall walk and the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with joy and gladness.

Rooms of the AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION, }
56 Reade Street, New York. }